The
TRAVELLER
and
OTHER POEMS
by IRIS TREE

Boni & Liveright

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THE TRAVELLER

THE TRAVELLER AND OTHER POEMS

BY

27-14255

IRIS TREE

New York
BONI & LIVERIGHT
1927

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I

THE TRAVELLER

The Traveller

ALL doors are shut, no comrade draws you in,
The narrowing streets lead into open night,
Hedges to forests,
Rivers into seas;
A few blown trees
Against the white streaks rending the horizon
Seem straining at their roots of precipice;
The bubbling flow and twist of tides
Sucked to the swell of thunder and recoil
In the remote of oceans' music.
But where the land ends and the broken world
Lets the surf in through jagged pinnacles,
Behold a church, towering above the sea—
Built from the rocks, moulded from many waters
Her walls seem swept with their resurgent whispers;
All doors are shut but hers, a door of dark
Leading through shadows and long silver lines
Where twilight, moonlight, dawn is tapering
Along the lace of the spray's fingers,
Among wavewoven echoes.
The aisles are passages whose stony rest
Seems ever to be woken,
Arch upon arch is quickened out of sleep
Widening until outspread
The last great archway opens
Bearing the sky upon its upstretched arms.
One image stands between those roofless columns—
"The Stranger" he is named, "The Traveller."
His back is turned, obscured against some glory,
The moving heavens on his unseen face
Drawing his limbs into an invocation—
Where the waves sweep
Dragged onwards by the clouds

With leaf, and bird and sail and the winged seed—
For the last broken altar
Is the wide gate of the wind,
And the eye of the soul
Wakening to start on its infinity.

1921

The Wandering Albatross

I SAW the long wings of the albatross
Sweep from the flood and lean upon the gale,
I heard his song on the green harps at sea
I watched him sail alone across the sky—
What spirit speeds his blood and shapes his form
What seed out of the deep into the height?
What light, defiance, lonely victory
What beacon to the angels of the storm?
Long wings across the crimson and the night
So strong in lightness and so solitary
What do they seek for in eternity
Will they alight and sleep when the young skies
Rain forth new seas enfolding paradise?

1926

Horses

WILD horses are stamping over grizzled moors,
Pounding the short soaked turf, leaving puddles of clay.
On the mountain slopes neighing in the snow wind,
Seeking pasture over barren lands,
Snuffing the sweet spring grass in the slant of the rain.
The stallion's neck is like a wave,
His chest is a thundercloud,
His speed devours the green prairies;
The many-coloured herd are shy and swift. . . .
In the steamy, sweaty, hay-dust of the stable
Pails clatter, chains rattle as the head rears from the trough,
The bulging flanks swell in the musty dark.
With sleek limbs suppling, ears and nostrils sensitive,
With shivering muscles and delicate nervous pacing
The thoroughbred sidles in the paddock.
Old bones that raced the green grow slack and weary,
On London streets, the cab horse jogging home
Slip-slop jingle through the rain and fog . . .
A Western Bronco squealing in mid-air
Bursting his burden with his heart of rage,
Kicking the earth away, biting the dust.
Winged chargers beating up the storm,
On legendary seas the manes of foam.
The red horse comes with war, the pale horse bearing death—
A big-bellied mare lies in a shady stupor,
Her foal looks down from tall, uncertain legs
With gentle, hazed, unrecognizing stare.

1926

The Frog

HE climbs down murky stairs,
With splayed feet pushing back dark curtains,
Green fans and slowly waving filmy arrases.
White globes float up from him,
Bubbles glossed with twilight and moonlight.
Shadows writhe under him
Shooting duskily, poised
With tremulous fins
And wriggling, darting tails.
His eyes stare with broad searchlights,
His mouth gulps, he sucks and swallows,
His belly feels the slime
Glide polished, yielding, secret.
He kicks and paddles with long gestures
Continuing their ripple, swaying the weeds apart.
He lies on the smooth black surface.
His eyes know the starlight,
And he hears the barking and croaking of the lovers.
He is lusty and swells with passion
Watching the speckled flash where the females leap,
Stretching their yellow bodies, jerking their legs.

1923

The Donkey

LOW drooped head steady in the rain's slant needles,
Still in the motion of the rushing grasses,
Bigbellied he stands and waits.
His eyes are wells of reverie
And his long ears are stretched up listening,
Listening, but as shells listen to the seas
Transforming them to fainter ghostlier echoings;
Nostalgic for some music left behind
Long passed, long dead, remembered only
By those long listening echoing ears.
Gentle the sound of his ambling hoofs,
Gentle and soft the touch and breath of his nostrils,
Warm and kind to the touch he is
Remote with the patience of the solitary.
Hear the braying of the donkey!
All the herbs and thistles patiently churned,
All the long listening
All the pensive waiting
And slow years gathering
In that passionate call
That broken chant of mourning
Rending the lonely meadows
Lost and unanswered.

1923

Clouds

I WRITE on clouds. They do reflect my passions,
My very inward signs to outward sense,
For they obscure and they are fugitive,
I have not touched the clear sky's innocence—
I do not write on flesh, my heart is written
With figures I translate in shapes and tones
Mistily. I dare not register
My human calendar upon my bones.
I praise the sun with shadows, and discover
Through symbols of discarnate life that move
Across the shining face of my beloved
The phantom not the body of our love.
Evade and pass between the earth and heaven,
Trail shades, and steal in smoke between the bars
Of every gate, reflected on the waters
Changed in the wind, transparent to the stars.

1926

Faces

I HAVE seen faces flagrantly questioning
Silently beckoning for fresher words
To clothe their stammering curiosity.
Quizzical faces clamouring in circles
As though among their midst a shrouded star
Should bare its naked body to be felt
With querying hands and kissed with tasting lips.
They even press their noses to my windows
Grope round me, swim like fishes in a bowl . . .
I catch them in the pockets of my soul,
Desire and poverty are in their thieving . . .
But I have never seen a quiet face
Sloped downwards to the hands that hold so simply
Truth, as one holds a flower.

1921

Eyes

THE freedom I seek in your eyes
Is the next gateway to the last star.
There are eyes that would still me,
The gentle annulling darkness of eyes
That would bear me sleeping to their own country,
Those sick nostalgic eyes
Carrying their brides home to the deathbed.
Eyes that would see me smiling,
Stay me as I wrestle
Tranquillizing enmity with sweet reproach;
That would find safety for love,
Churchyard eyes, pensive toward the grave.
There are dungeons in eyes,
And prisons like many-sided mirrors
That flatter prison with a dancing company
Out of one solitary figure's pacing.
I have been captive of such eyes,
The mind behind was blind and knew me not
When I broke through my image,
But I was wounded in many places by one stone
And suffered the bleeding of my shadows.
Eyes that flinch and are pitifully brave,
Eyes that are false and promise truth behind,
Avenues smiling into deceptive distance;
No liars' eyes can see beyond the doubt and faith of others,
They lead in circles narrowing to death,
The everlasting beggar leading fools.
But there are eyes of the never returning
Whose ways we dare not choose,
They open to the wanderer

And he is lost beyond the circle's rim.
Dangerous seaward and skyward eyes
Wreckless and patient of all
Pulled through all worlds by the beam of the last star.
The freedom I seek in your eyes
Is strength to penetrate through eyes like those,
Pitiless, wild and pure.

1926

To the Body

DREAM your arms of longing like the margins of the shore
That the sea loves;
Your flesh a corn field hushed in its noon blaze
That the wind moves.

Dream your valleys full of lights, full of whispers
When the streams fill,
Full of birdsong like evening
When the air is still.

Rest body of desires and listen
A white cave
Where the spray creeps up with melody
From the breast of a wave.

Dream yourself flowers, dream yourself clouds
That float, that linger
Sweet odours, sweet shadows from sunlight
Over the singer.

Dream your love into no thoughts, no sins, no confessions,
No vain words
But lie still and clear like the young spring heaven
Filling with birds.

1927

Prayer

I BELIEVE in prayer.
Not those prayers spoken hurriedly in fear
To break ascending clouds,
Or contradict a sin with cries of pity;
But prayers of life constantly sensing its direction
With patience unravelling all signs
That mark a margin where no end is seen.
Creating mountains for their climbing
Building a summit for their peace,

Sinking their roots into those heights
Shedding their seed on wind
For nourishing the valleys.
I believe in prayer
The seed of the gardener,
The stones of the builder.

1921

Of Touching

THAT which I seek with human hands to know
My whole life touches, be it stranger, friend
Or naked winter tree; my love shall lend
Of its own substance, I shall feel it grow
With the same growth as God, out of the slow
Blind travail of all prayers it shall ascend
And faith will know it—there our tears have end
The dust, rock, image moulded by their flow.

We touch it with our spirits, as this hand
So slowly moves its fingers to caress
They pass through æons, worlds, and understand
I touch, I deeper reach the fathomless
Navel of time where yet the mother strand
Doth bind thee fast oh Everlastingness!

1924

The Word

TELL me,
Let me build from your sayings illusory cities,
And as your voice beats mightier
Hammering those gates that would possess me
Let me grow smaller, slender
That I may pass
On, through the fine craft of your thin-laced whispers.
Let your meanings carving out their steps
Thrill me in quickening breaths upgrowing far
Into a sigh's light spire
Crumbling to its majestic ruins, sliding dust,
Dissolved perfection levelled for fresh heights.
Then build for me the void,
Speechless scoop out a womb of brimming azure
Vaulting the branches of my skeleton;
Oh sower, speaker, singer,
Imagining new leaves out of the dead
Moulding the silence to unuttered tones,
Weave on my bones that are your instruments
A gold cocoon of vibrant sleep
On buzzing spindles and of muted silk,
That I the listener
May from the fervid stillness of the chrysalis
Issue light-winged, evocative, the dancer,
Out of the spelling of new notes unkeyed
Into the revelation of the word!

1924

II

REFRAINS OF LONDON

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Refrains of London

I

FIVE o'clock in London, November, December,
Noises of the street trail off in yellow air,
Yellow and grey, smells I remember,
Lamplight, cabbages, damp trees in the square.

Rain and the mist and wheels make daylight dreary,
The travelling moon on the night when I was born
Sucked shadows into dreams . . . I am weary
On London pavements the moon grew into dawn. . . .

Dresses I wore, with every brilliant sheath
Youth wraps new husks about his ageing heart,
Withering thin and rustling underneath
Lairs of faded mimicry that stay though he depart.

And shall I tear them off, assign each vesture
To its peculiar ghost and watch them meet?
Watch their brave colour and rebellious gesture
Obscured and vague in the too crowded street?

Is there no truth in each discarded story
Shall not a steadfastness of eye recover
Through shades of shadows the first dark and glory,
The singer and the builder and the lover?

Derisive are old violins
Playing round corners of my heart,
The melancholy of romantic sins
Now let me sign with laughter and depart—

II

The café Royal is pulled down
Merged in smoky gold the faces
Burning up their tragic clown,
The poet's loneliness in crowded places.

The Bull Bush at Golders Green
Which we rifled in the dawn
Built over; and the house where I was born;
No eyes shall see what I have seen.

My old bedroom five flights high,
Steps like a recurring rhyme,
Hallway, letters, pause and sigh,
Burne-Jones pictures, slow clocks' chime.

Sunset roofs, the long lights glitter,
Huddled shadows, highlights, brass,
Papers, bottles, dresses, litter,
Myself seen in the looking glass.

Grey my face; a mass of greys
Loom and waver. Turn on the light
Stillness stiffened under glaze,
Flattened by a stare of white.

Little pangs breed a large grief,
Large the haunted moon unscrolls
Cloudy signs, my unbelief
Blows through mists of vanquished souls.

Waiting, little pangs are breeding,
The coals settle, Sunday feet
On flat solitudes receding,
Then the taxis' flurried beat.

Late return from escapades,
Hammer in the heart the hammer
Beating omens out of shades,
Beating terror out of glamour.

Threads of sequences entangle
Panic tugs a distant bell
Jostle up the loudening jangle
Would it were bedtime and all well. . . .

Love the dawn is running in
From the spring, the waves, the sea
Enfolding green, my lonely sin
Blossoms like a poison tree.

Ah, your face upon each wave
Changes conquering, light burns you
Holy, I have dug your grave
In the night, the dawn returns you. . . .

Sleep—the June sun from full quivers
Strains the blue bow of the skies
Bursts the breast in sparkling rivers
Flooding up through wakening eyes.

Summer fever, the white frocks
Droop and lag, a street of sails—
We chained up to rusty docks
Dream Ragusa and Marseilles.

Sunlight rustles in Soho
Shall we eat outdoors to-day?
I can smell the grass they mow,
In long-shadowed meadows far away.

III

Fullness of summer to our sharp spring's hunger—
Pedlars are crying wares, the ballad-monger
Riding on floral donkeys down our street.
The slade-girls sitting on the grass to eat
Are beautiful to one another, all are gay;
Sparrows in the courtyard; it is May
And summer comes to us, touches our fingers
Of Love while we are drawing, sighing lingers
Around us with remembering light and raises
Our eyes into a twilight full of daisies.

IV

Actors on the theatre stairs,
Forever rustle, clatter, echo, sibilate,
From the dismantled stage those silent tiers
In an unnatural dusk remain inviolate—
This churchlike emptiness is strange to me
So many ghosts have left it solitary.
The vacant stage hanging with brown and ropes
The man in shirtsleeves with a bowler hat—
Will all our episodes end just like that?
The fanciful contortions of our hopes
End so, and sighing go?
Will lines I loved, heard here upon the stage,
Contain more tears than any living page,
More truth, more pity? Something old
Stirs in my youth and mourns across the city,
Something cold out of the coming years.

V

Mornington Crescent
Is a depressant to spirits sobered in the underground,
They have a forlorn sound these stations;
To be born in the town of these!

Squares with dark shrubs and trees
That shiver in November leaf!
Born by a grey river in the hesitations
Of traffic, remembering little shops
With gaslight stares on paving stone,
Buy toys there and pear drops. . . .
There is no relief
From the return of sights and sounds
Alien to spirit, familiar to the bone—
This and that have been before
Will come again,
And I shall be alone once more
In the underground
On rainy days, umbrellas raised above,
Loveless returning somewhere alien,
Somewhere known, to an old door.

VI

I have sat so long at these tables,
I do not think new fables
Can come through that same door
Where I have watched before,
How often, the strange face appear
Grow familiar, older year by year.
What masks this room embalms
Among the turtles, pictures, palms,
What a collection of faces
Intensities of many races
Tamed to a custom's one grimace.
Does the magician of this place
Concoct from various bloods a sauce of habit
Mystically flavouring his salmi of rabbit,
While monsters shrink to fit his jumping hoop?
Crafty and mythical marchand de soup
Levelling all to a perennial jest!

I loved the evenings best
When their ingredients were most queerly mingled
When a muted shrillness tingled
Endlessly, and deep tones held their sigh
Through all the clamour to the dawning sky;
When one unsmiling image stern and dark
Brooded, like Noah presiding in the ark. . . .
This is a pack of cards I greet them all
As hazard deals them; here the small
Pale face, pale eyes, above the Pierrot's frill,
The knave you cannot reckon on comes still,
The bearded king, the bearded chemist, there
The grinning derelict with yellow hair,
The beautiful prophet, tender-eyed and sick
The powdered rat, the monkey up the stick
The ace a stranger and a fate foretold,
You jack of diamonds I know you of old. . . .
The shepherd piping for his chosen flock
Surveys the empty tables and the clock,
Green evening and the organ tunes
Waiters clattering with plates and spoons.
All of us adventurers return
Sprinkled with atmosphere from the brass urn
Reviving broken songs of love and danger,
The phantom deed, the legendary stranger.

VII

It darkens nearing London,
Victoria—the whole city moans
Roars up its long monotone
Dismally drawing to one oldness;
Many evenings drawing down the blinds
Trace the day's ending, journey's ending—
The clock ticks and the shuttle winds—
Parades of soldiers fading, frayed—

Sun descending through the curtain's sallowed lace,
Lamp on the table dinner laid for one.
Heaping the scuttle stoking the fire
In a long reverie of damp December
Glows of red creep up the smoke,
Smoulder in the embers—
Desire and colour shows between the bars
Histories, songs and scars that once have bled—
Retarding haste for memory
All grows older but is slow to die
We return from the wars
Live long and remember.

VIII

Across the bridges the slow traffic crawling,
Down the river the slow barges.
Far, from the marges of the sea
The fog-horn and the seagulls calling.

The darkening city and the paling river
Seem but the mood of a love long forsaken,
All I have taken turns to a dream,
All that I gave is a dream unto the giver.

The once loved faces are a mood of memory
Deeds, years and things to mist and water shifting
But one dark boat is drifting down the stream,
Unto ourselves we too are shadowy.

Soul from all scenes, shapes, voices tidally
Turns to itself now in the mist and lateness—
"Bird, I have sent you mateless across the sea
Out of my heart to return unto me." . . .

1927

At a Dance

WEARILY apart I sit though still my flesh is warm
with partners of the feast,
And still my laughter froths as from the yeast of curious
chemicals beyond my will.
This tainted music that disgusts and pleases, this fog of
faces hateful and appealing,
Cut wounds within my heart and give them healing, are
both the fever and the drug that eases.
I feel aloof and cold, though keeping chime with clicking
tongues, brains whirring and unwinding,
With laughter shrill, and restless fingers binding a dying
garland round the feet of Time—
But in some face of stillness or some word of sad heart's
question beating through the throng,
I seem to be released in answer-song that wings me on
the music of a bird
Pulsing the darkness. Suddenly the scale breaks on its
shrill and drops to that abyss
Of margins sinking below emptiness, where tones gape
voiceless as a dreamer's wail. . . .
Wilted, devitalised I seem to be, my flaunted valour like a
blowing flag,
Flaps pale and tattered as a washed-out rag that wetly coils
around the heart of me.
No jests can stir me, I can make no jest, a blurring dark-
ness shifts across the glass
Where my impressions leave their seal and pass from off
my spirit, stripping it for rest.
No rest, no quick impressions, limp and grey as worn
elastic stretched beyond its leap,
I quiver no response to those that keep their pull upon my
nerves, yet I obey
Their glance with a mechanical intent, as though my

thought were swifter than my speech,
As though my soul had leapt beyond their reach, and waited mocking. So I circumvent
Their scorn with an instinctive subtlety. . . . Yet why should I have waited
Within this vat of folly to be baited by fools I have redeemed with fantasy?
I see the stomach spirits that they force into such fanciful elaborate kit,
In stationary speed their pleasure sit astride them as upon a rocking-horse. . . .
I hear the music groan beneath the whip that goads it to a last hilarity,
I see my life with hectic clarity scourging itself into a final skip;
Melting all moments into one quick round of panting dance tune, cheating time
With all its chords that echo, hours that rhyme in Heaven, keeping the soul bound
Through mortal rhythm to eternal tune. . . . False is this tinkling jig that sets my feet
To such a frantic measure, while each beat stiffens my soul and freezes it immune—
The new day comes at length, but in his face I see the mottled colours of the last,
The future takes its semblance from the past and follows up the custom of its race—
This night shall be reflected in a glass, repeated in another dimly seen,
Endless perspective mimic what has been in avenues through which my life must pass—
And they at last converging to a wall shall make me halt, to find no open door
Through which to pass, I shall be evermore the guest of mirrors at a dancing hall. . . .

Hope without passion is a fear in lust that pays the bribe
of counterfeit to chance,
I yield the spangle of a dead romance picked from this
heap of animated dust!

1920

The Old Woman and the Wind

LAST night a wind moaning at the locked gates
Entered and left them swaying and shuddering,
Last night a wind howled up the chimneys
Rattled the windows, fluttered the curtains. . . .
The old woman sat upright in bed
Reading her Bible by still candle light,
The clock ticking, the cat sleeping on the chair,
Heard the wheezing and roaring of stormy voices,
Saw the flame lean sideways and the wax guttering.
Her wispy hair spun about her face
Like a white web, trembled and floated,
Her thoughts like spiders in the meshing of words
Caught at a meaning there and hesitated
While her slow finger pointed in the book,
But they scuttled away to the wind's tremor,
And the clock hurried, a quick heart ticking out.
Then as the curtain spread shadowy fans toward her,
Then as the cat woke, sidled and stiffened
Leapt on the bed, clawed at the coverlet,
And the clock whirred and struck in the hall,
She called, and her voice fell dead without echoes,
Like the snapping of a dry branch in the wind—
"Norah . . . Norah," she called and the wind made answer,
And the wind waited and was still. . . .

1920

Night Walk

SQUEALING down the long hollow of the street
Cat-calls, and my brain is tangled in that cry.
It is my brain skidding so black and somnambulant down the pavement,
It is my brain escaping through the dark bars and running down the wild wind.
And the pavement with its hard reflections
Glazes my vision,
Rebounding, slapping back to my eyes
That are a blank wall of staring where the lights buffet and the wind plunges a brutal fist.
A window slamming somewhere on some curse of wakening horror,
Of shivering sleepers disturbed with the tossing of the blind.
A window slams also on my memory
That has disturbed me with its aggressive call.
And those feet of the frightened sleeper padding on the cold floor
Are the feet of my will meeting the contact of their icy limit
Yet striving still to walk, not to stumble against some sharper edge.
And the flapping of the storm lurching against closed doors and giant trees,
And the frenzied chattering of the leaves and clenched rain,
Is the stark laughter of nightmare staggering down my corridors
Finding no room to enter, no gate to escape.
For so horror laughs within me down the long tunnels of the street;

So pain tears my lower consciousness, scarce recognized,
scarce felt,
So my mind runs in front of me black and insomnial with
its cynical cat-calling.
Yet this night with the close and brutal hug of its dark-
ness,
With its stars like gaping portals sucking my soul away,
And the fanatical rushing of its windy banners,
Seems like the swaying platform of my insurrections,
And like the fatal gesture of my violent end.

1921

Street Tune

HOW can I stay in my house today
Teased by the flute and the tambourine,
Soldiers marching, the drums play,
The people have come to see the queen.
They are hanging a man on the gallows tree,
Voices howling up the street,
Blood and wine with victory
Flow across the dead man's feet.
The clock has stopped, the fire is out,
Spiders crawl across the ceiling,
Through the windows, scuffle, shout,
Cursing, running and bells pealing.
So many crowding at the bar
Call for glasses, drink and leave,
One stands with the door ajar
And a hand tugs at my sleeve.
Feet follow swiftly while I laugh
In the quick light of a knife,
There are cups that I must quaff
To grow reckless of my life.

1922

Area Steps

DIM in a wintry alley, white by the sodden snow
My last cringing fancy lights his lamp to go,
Bears his swaying lantern glimpsing through the rails,
Shadows yawning catlike by the empty pails,
Voices leaking slyly underneath a door,
Two old women drinking on the cellar floor.
Raise the broken knocker, tap and wait in vain
While the silence shudders in the rain.
Two old women chirping on the cellar floor,
Close the gaping window, bolt the windy door.

1922

Give Me My Old Coat Again

GIVE me my old coat again
That I have worn through many days of rain
Whose hue is varied ripened by the sun
To earth's near garment; give me one
Of my old books to read by firelight half asleep
Whose effaced memories leave gaps of deep
Conjecture over thoughts that lie at rest
Beneath their placid linen. Let the blessed
White hands of silence touch me, and the white
Cool hands of rivers soothing through the night
Into the dreams of tranced sleepers, hands
Reminiscent, binding me with scented bands.
The wake of clouds shall touch me whose pale ships
Pass suavely over, let the whispering lips
Of twilight tell me of dead loves and legend glories,
And let these flames unscroll their golden stories
And fold them with the pinch of dusty fingers.
Ah! in this darkness many a sunset lingers
And many a dream within this dozing,
Things slow revealed and dimly closing. . . .
Give me my old town again
That I have watched through ghostly scarves of rain,
Through fog its largening lamps, through morn its grey
Bare skeleton stretched on a lonely day. . . .
Give my old joy and wonder back again
The adolescent loveliness of pain
But let me touch them now and know and bless
With this new love and dawning tenderness.

1920

Old Iron

OLD iron rustling in the nettles
Hoops and girds and battered slag
Coils and wheels writhing twisted
Sharp and fanged in the bitter grass.
If I had a flute or a whistle
If I were a fiddler
I would play on that seragged pile, in rags I would sit
Because of a melancholy mood
I would make tunes, new tunes, bitter and wild
Out of the snarl of those dead fragments.
Iron out of the earth,
Iron out of the fire,
Black iron jangling upon iron
Old Iron rusting red on the green—

1923

III

REFRAINS OF PARIS

Refrains of Paris

RUE D'ENFER ROCHERSAU, RUE NOTRE DAME DES CHAMPS

THE streets are folded round me like a scroll;
How slow the poplar leaves come into green
The river shines and darkens, things are seen
In all the changes of the light and of the soul.
Quai de la Tournelle, Quai d'Orléans.

Here pass the boats on Sunday full of people,
Upstream to greenwoods floating tired and gay,
Downstream to factories, and bal musettes—
Processions of eccentric silhouettes
Fading to paleness round the ring of day
Blurred by thin rains, pierced by a Gothic steeple.

Nocturnal cats you sheltered; at the fair
I won a pigeon; now the white dog's ghost
Plays with the black dog's shadow; now the old
Normandy woman brings us loaves of gold,
We feast our vagabonds, you are the host,
In restless mirrors I make smooth my hair.

The fire blinks half asleep and last lights dwindle
From the blue windows, music sinks to mist
On the dead trees; it is the ghosts who sing
Bringing their daffodils from graves at spring.
We drank the warm red wine, but when we kissed
Each had his own cold thought we could not kindle.

Returning late to Paris from the woods
Whose soul hangs deep and sweet like organ tones,
Our faces drink the still gold of the skies,
But when the quick lights flit across my eyes
And all the city tingles in my bones
I drop your hand to pluck at raffish moods.

Back to our room from faces, streets and fairs,
Your lamp burned through the shadow of the crowd,
I brought my fancies, you your libraries,
The rooms we lived in were as rosaries,
I read my sins in whispers and out loud,
Bowed to our beads old tunes were mixed with prayers.

Star seen from ships; in trains the lights retreating
Chain the long night with cities, destinies,
Still star, swift lights beat up an exaltation
Abstract and boundless . . . at the railway station
Your grave face waits . . . all dark intensities
Shadowly scatter in the smile of greeting.

Questions in taxis and the eye of change
Accosting memories, new hopes, old pangs,
Custom will conquer us, laughter restrain. . . .
Bridges to islands—can it be again
The sighing bell, the pause, then the door clangs,
Our steps, your voice, the room so still and strange?

We lived upon an island, circling round
Life drew more close our ring of banishment;
The river flowed and time, guests came and went
But deep within we crept and closer bent
Upon our inner deadly argument
Digging escaping tunnels under ground.

Brown mellow melancholy, ears for feet
Listening, power slips into silence, drop by drop,
Heart beating out in panic by the fire—
But you will sing back sorrow and desire,
We will go out together, pain will stop
For meals at least, where shall we drink and eat?

And did I not exaggerate my troubles,
Dress greed in longing, sloth in desperation,
And need your eyes mourn at me? All is well,
We feed in restaurants and not in hell,
This is not argument but conversation
The frail and brilliant emptiness of bubbles. . . .

The dusk was poison-green, and horror grew
From every innocent bud, I felt a tomb
Under your roots, for you had been to me
Strong as the earth and wholesome as a tree—
As giant trees turn demon in the gloom
So was the nightmare of my dream of you.

You caress death through all the living forms,
You only sail when hungry waters throb,
You start uphill along a windy road,
You are a pilgrim carrying a load,
You are a beggar whom the sparrows rob,
You crave to give your strength to feed the worms.

And I who sought your truth among my lies
How could I find you? Shapes of common things
Grew strange and guilty, and I knew them not.
But every human light and need forgot
Running to catch at legendary wings
My comrade angel scaling paradise.

Yet human light for which my heart was lonely
Smiled back and innocence on a far hill
Came down like bells, when we were very tired.
And all suspense in gentleness expired,
Our paths were folded and our hands lay still
Palms up in peace holding the sunlight only. . . .

Where shall we travel now the green leaf thrills,
Now leaves droop dustily and flutter down?
Find our contempt again, our wandering singer,
Earth smelling, God divining, the life bringer?
Born in a town I shall return to town
And you return again into your hills.

Streets into mountains, rivers to the sea
By winding ways returning to the street—
Beasts, faces, hearts we touched and left behind,
Touchstones of love we groped by growing blind
To touch each other; we shall only meet
Our own aloneness gazing to the sea.

We only meet at margin's end where never
Makes a deep furrow for our last song's words
Across the silence, and the ebbed-out tide
Turns to efface our islands and divide—
Winds call the waves, the sky is full of birds—
I shall bear you with me also and forever.

1926

He Lived Under the Mountain Crags

HE lived under the mountain crags
That jut fierce chins through steeping woods of pine;
And music was the summit of his sense,
Storming above enchantment of old books.
No childhood's charm of curls and high-pitched questions
Brought him caressing hands to soothe his tears
Kept bitter-broiling in the sheltered eyes
Whose brow shadowed their glance.
His face was set
For manhood in ambition of tomorrow
That drove him into mutinous explorations
High on the breasts of hills
And deep in loneliness within the breasts of women.
A love as pitiless as fire
Crept up the smoke of his inquiring youth,
Religious incense, tender-wreathing dreams,
Devils and angels danced their fairy rings
Along the sloping ice of winter landscapes,
But when their stormy wings were furled in mist
And his fatigue had played a wistful note
Calling the summer, Life then led him forth
Out of imagination's gates; in hope, his youth
Filled memory with shapes of many flowers.

1923

Three in a Room

ALL day we sat by the fire—
It is winter, the lamps light early.
I went out into the chill,
I slid across the polished solitudes,
The road clamped as a man passed, hands in his pockets,
shaded,
Into the swing of a whining door.
Here in the warm stir of the room your figures bent
rustling
As the coals rustling settled ashy-lidded
And the shadows flickered in a soundless dance—
Upon the threadbare crimson leaning back
I sat, my fretful questions rallied by a smile
Blinked in the long filmed pauses of your meditation—
At length clearing your throats, soothingly you answered
Stretching a slow arm to the littered table
For the fidget of a cigarette
Calming the aftermath of sound-rippled thoughts
With darkly-linking silences.
Both reading separate and unaware
I wavering in between
Disrobing and hesitating in my preparations
For some far-hinted festival, coquetting with time's length
By an impatient twitching down from hooks
Heaped dresses, lingering from mood to mood
Unsatisfied forewarning it in vain.
And then you yawned . . . long afternoons
Stretched shivering and huddled in their glow
Stupefied by a fleshful peace—
Perhaps your yawn is my awakener,
That teases me with margins to surpass
Or empty ways to fill,

For only when you hold me in your brains
Can I find peace in mine.
Evening flowed past you, and between,
I with it floated like a boundary river
Merging two songs in silence.
All day we sat by the fire
And the wasted light sunk coughing to the grate
Where the long shadows poked for buried legends,
Illegible, unspoken in the ashes.

1923

The Green Bed

OVER our bed, our green bed
The wind rushes on a bald field.
Just where our bodies lay
One moon with faces up
In the bright wheel of stars resolving us;
Lay flat, and small and far yet growing great
Pondering in our frail hearts
The firstbuds of our flowers into their fruit,
Sprung from the infinite tree
Suppliant young out of the praying of the seed.
We lay so close,
The wind presses closer, laughing in the mouths of grass,
We lay so close,
The wind is not so wide
As the broadening breath of our separate sigh.
Rains have knocked there, were welcomed and hidden darkly,
Shot forth with spring in joyful resurrection,
Perhaps our tears were lifted up in love
Webbing the stars in loneliness for one another,
But no green silhouette has traced our limbs
Or measured us in sleep with print of flowers.
I stand beside our bed
As at a tomb shut in by the glad grass
That I would enter;
I wish my shadow were a sunlight figure
Containing our two bodies
In one tall effigy of pregnant gold—
But the wind chases leaves across our bed
Scattering summer memories with curses.

1924

Backwaters

(Marseille)

RED ribbons in the hair,
Bare shoulders, stockinged knees,
Sirens singing a popular air
From their caverns under seas.
A dark sea that never rests
Wreathing scum around the quays,
Mermaids where the seaweed sways,
Showing wounds instead of breasts.
In the harbour oyster-bars,
Ocean monsters, ocean fruit,
Monster men with black cigars,
Women show above the boot
Gluttonous calves, above the bust
Gluttons' faces rouged for lust.
Shall we prick the octopus?
From his belly comes the strength
For his clutching tendrils' length,
Prick, before he captures, us?
In the caverns under tide
Sirens hum familiar ditties
Suck us back from where we glide
To the whirlpool of the cities.

1923

At Zelli's

ELECTRIC lights, electric moons,
Newspaper men, paper festoons,
Melancholy figures,
The emanations of ecstatic niggers
Rag of their bone
The saxophone
Oh, when will the dancers leave her alone
American voices spoken from the shoulder
We never grow older
As we grow older
Syncopation
I cannot lose myself in conversation
American tunes
Electric moons, coons, baboons,
Stolen spoons,
I wear them in my sleeve
Whereon my heart should grieve
Waiters wipe my tears away.
You have napkins I will pay.

1923

Late

OUT of the faces, feet
No darkness, silence of retreat
The streets come whistling near from far
Into the vacant eye the hollow ear.
Broom hurried empty bar
Too large filled with glass brass clatter highlights
Too white too spruce dingy coupled left ajar
For draughty gaps and feet and twilights
Matted shadows shredded by the gaslight.
Trams clamp clinching the twittering rails,
Skidlights, the traffic wails
A shadow shoots
Stiff circling brightness muffled wheels.
Stamp all secure on flat the boots
Quick tipping tapping heels
Flicker time's urge in kicks
On hidden earth's cold breast, timeticks
Late late oh never,
Never leans from the clock
Pale moonlike laden calling without chiding,
Clink chink turn the key in the lock
Never within your room ever abiding.

1923

Between These Lighter Verses

BETWEEN these lighter verses there are verses
That limp between each leap
Queens' carriages followed by funeral hearses,
Black gloves in which to weep
Are substitute for tears.
I can no longer weep, so now my clowns
Go dressed in mourning for those tragic years
That set my jewels in their sombre crowns.
I have no purpose, under this or that
I run like a dog between the wheels of fate,
I have no crown nor wear a pilgrim's pate,
I take out my heart and offer it in my hat.

1923

IV

CROSSWAYS

Crossways

AT crossways now the rubbish cart unloads.
Oh, to unwind again, smoothe out the crumpled roads
That my giddiness clutching rolled into a ball.
Far lands are tatters of a paper wall,
The ugly feast-end of a holiday, where sprawl
Collapsed mountains, tide-out mud, bottles, and toads.

Wherever tents are pitched, the grass grows brown,
And drunk with death, upon the furthest heights
Of lovers' pilgrimage the carrion kites
Scream round their ravished altars. From the town
Come arm in arm the prostitute and clown
To picnic there in memory of old delights.

Must flesh corrupt that which the soul had sought
To make the sense its spirit understand?
Must touching beauty with a reverent thought
Defile with blasphemous hand?
Must immortality by time be caught,
And love find death on reaching its own land?

One lover creates worlds, another
Himself creates, and some destroy.
And I am one whose seeking kisses smother
The breath of love and every still-born joy
Is buried in the bosom of its bitter mother
Recorded in the mockery of a toy.

The good ingrows to evil. The conception
Hidden by brooding darkness is disturbed by lights that
slope
From the impatient soul that scents deception,
Husband-hate bastarding the new-born hope.

And the unnamed, obscure desires that grope
Birth-seeking find in death life of corruption.

Darkness fears darkness, borrowing false fire
To make all brilliant that was cold and still
Dawn-waiting, blind. The panic-broken will
Repeats ancestral failures and betrays desire
That wants fulfilment but cannot fulfil;
And fire of birth becomes the funeral pyre.

I have beheld the might of the rising tide,
And seen it ebb away, scum, wreckage, drift
Are left upon the margins to divide
Future and past with dead things. The waves lift
Dead things, and these are love's last gift,
This pale drowned harlot is the immortal bride.

1925

The Pale Cast

I CANNOT forge from all these soft abstractions
A hard and bright philosophy.
The shadows of swords alone
Clink their innocuous weapons in my brain
And falter at the thrust of action's truth.
So I have envied the fanatic's knife,
The wild man's arrows,
The blunderbuss of credulous tradition
Handed from generations down.
I have desired belief
Uncreased by any lurking smile,
But speaking harsh and clear:
"This is your tool, your labour, here your friend,
And there your enemy whom you shall kill!"
Then all these complicated negatives
Diffusing from reactions—emptiness,
Would sheathe their whispering tongues, and I should rise
From the numb babble of their contradictions
To keep a single road
Whetting my axe against an adverse wind.

1922

Abstraction

BIGNESS! The world's not big enough,
I feel too cumberous a mountain.
If now I were dissolved
Shrunken to a small crab's crutching energy
Upon some isle of purple slime
Veined with the filigree of swaying emerald
A sinking temple among monster deaths,
To crawl with hard and gripping claws
Jealously denting with each step
My lover kingdom sleeping between tides
With sea and Heaven so vast.
No enemies are tall and dark enough
Straddling the sun with blackness,
No sounds so loud and fierce to deafen life
Leaving the inward scale of songs' eternity
Echoing up like buried architects
Boned in their own stone hills
Stretching their skeleton inspired to church the soul.
No death so blinding sudden miracled
With all the spangled revelation of the stars
Tiaraed to that summit jewel
Of prismed gates unlocked.
All known, all sighed, all told this death
All wished for in the mourners' epitaphs
Chiselled on slabs in lettered tears
Upon the grey and sliding avalanche of weeping spheres.
No world is big enough, no sea, no Heaven
To make this island sink into its soul.

1923

Adolescence

NEVER for me the paleblooming wistaria,
The garden paths where a sighing gallant walks,
Blushing at tea-table, hysteria,
The sister comfort and the evening talks
At sewing or the reading of romances,
Never the stamp and bounce at village dances,
Nor tryst in silver lanes beneath the lace
Of still leaves in the moonlight, nor embrace
By sea-surf when the waters' passionate moan
First sounds with meaning, the presaging hour
When the sweet-burdened spirit walks alone
Melted by birdsong, wounded with a flower—
Never for me the beginning
I knitted up my life with broken ends,
Now through the tangled meshes of my spinning
I see the quiet sky; the sun descends
Leaving black crosses and an empty net—
Oh had I waited fast behind the fret
That loosed me into shimmering illusions
Should I have plucked my truth out of confusions,
Learned all of human passion and reality
Travelling blind from instinct to fatality?

1922

What You Will

WHAT is my sex and meaning and ambition?
I am what you shall name me. Superstition
Hangs on the lips of idols that are mute,
Music is holy in the silent lute
That waits the wings of every sleeping tone.
You stand beside me—we are both alone.
Where do I come from, go, what chains shall bind me?
There is nothing before me or behind me,
I come from all your margins, from your stress
Of questioning, and I am the dividing guess
Of life to dream. Or just a woman in a dress.

1923

To Mother

LIKE a long harvest hill my life appears
Where all the sheaves lie bound, the golden years,
The blasted stubble, empty chaff, full ears,
Dead poppies shutting secrets in their sleep.
And some are gathered, some are left to reap
And memories go gleaning. Ghostly field,
Tall sheaves beneath the harvest moon revealed,
A city or a graveyard, pyres of flames
Or heaps of ashes. Yet I will reclaim
Out of my dreams and sorrows, songs and deeds
A shaken bundle of the mystic seeds.
This handful that I cast upon the wind
Knowing the wind has care and will be kind
Blowing my prayers into that furthest star
Where they shall one day blossom, and though far
Hear now within the floating of all wings
And the night's trembling glimmer, how it sings
My lonely bird of praise within that tree
Your love has planted in eternity.

1922

The Tree

TREE in the frozen fields
Shrinking to your lone stillness on the grey
Black-barring the winged Heavens. . . .
Evening has drawn the cerements of darkness
Round its lean limbs of light with glimmering shudders.
Each molten cloud
Is beaten thin and fades
Out of whose burnished flames the stars are forged
Chiselled in purity from the days' dross.
Oh winter heart! Oh bare and twisted soul
Stiffening your branches out upon the silence
And blasted upward to the frigid sky
Your clenched bones pray to break upon its thunder,
Implore the withering music of the winds.
Gaunt martyr, haggard beggar at Death's road,
Death shall pass by and you shall still remain—
Not storms nor lightnings' dazzling slaughter
Effacing you with gold upon the night,
Not snow's white burial of dancing tears
Resurgent from tired waters—
But rain falling softly from the loosened calm,
But greyness giving way before a star,
But a brown wing reverberate on the air,
A bubble of hyacinth smell burst in the wood,
And the bell of a blossom ringing over graves.

1924

God in Man

THE crowded brain is crossed and crossed with symbols,
With remnants, relics, hints; and what comes in
Leaves but its husk behind, and thought evades
Yet touches with recoil, with fascination
Textures and shapes discerning not the form.
There is no room for more, yet more encroaches,
New specks and half-conceptions breeding shadows,
Shadows of shadows, semblances, comparisons.
Let us make one of many, we are made
Many of one, not knowing form or speech
But only names of temporary aspects.
We have forgotten eternity and world,
Water and fire and wind and night and day,
We see not man nor woman, but observe
Features and gestures, maps and corridors.
Attached in part to parts, we grow no stem
Erect out of deep roots, but creeping vines
With the blind-fingered clutching of their tendrils,
With fruitless blossoms dangling in the shade
Of upright forces, looping them with questions,
Entwining with an amorous death-embrace.
No sucking centre, only sensitive tips
Of thievish questioning fingers, tasting lips
And poisonous spittle churning into words.
Words, finger-pokings, myths and memories;
Deed is not, nor God's lightning in the marrow,
Blood rusts, the bone is hollowed out by worms.
Out of all graves creep back the devouring slaves
Making profane memorials of their crime.
Gossip of graves the trembling pulses whisper,
Heart hunting in the famine turns again
And sniffs the rotting corpse of yesterdays.

How shall the carrion-feeding hunter fast
Haunted by demons of his ancient slaughter
Compelling him to drink their poisonous steam,
Again receive their ghosts and give them up?
Consuming life he must all death consume,
Divide against himself, the hunter hunted.
When the soul shall starve and the heart be emptied
And the brain eat its refuse, when no more
The worms and weedlike tendrils creep and twist,
Then shall be only dust and tears, then seed,
Then sprout, then beast, then hunter, builder, woman,
Creator form and speech and God in man.
And the world shall be rolled in his belly like a seed
Unfolding from him, him from that unfolded,
Himself emerging from himself unknown.
For his love only shall know from the beginning
And his tongue shall tell of it unto the end.

Paris, November 12, 1924.

Eternal Death

EXPLOSION petrifies. The balance of all things
Hangs on a cross of doubt that stands alone
In pyres of smoked-out chaos, amid rings
Of dead light where the winds make hollow moan;
Sands trickle from the empty watersprings.
Time is suspended. On his nest of bone
The Promethean eagle starves, under his wings
The fiery egg is turned into a stone.

1924

V

RETURNING

Returning

I SHALL always come back to you when I am tired,
Out of the deep your love emerges
While I sink down and fail,
And like a delicate scaffolding you stay
Outlasting in my ruins,
The moments conquer me,
So swift and free
Their discs are flung to heaven from my hands
That I must follow them, must feel the crash
Of their descent upon my credulous heart.
My faith in you as stillness under wind
Remains when storms have filled and emptied me,
Yet even in the healing of our silent days
I listen for the wind and lose your voice.
The many lives that cluster round my life
Are but the leaves in which my solitude shall ripen,
Are but the husks that I must tear from loneliness
Within whose core my seed lies stilly hiding.
And so before the end I shall return
Journeying still further out of you,
For you perhaps may be
My lesser solitude, the arm on which I lean
Fearfully gazing toward infinity. . . .

1921

To Time Before Sleeping

TIME you spoke softly to me with the voice of your bell,
And I will answer softly, like a farewell
That promises return; I will come back to things,
All things that have been dear and touch them with my wings
To free their spirits. Because of your gentleness
I will be patient, remembering the sorrowful caress
Of your submission, of your old, chained hands,
And when I journey into imagined lands
I will bring back to you of their fresh leaves;
And in your old, sad hands that life bereaves
And fills again, I will lay my calm eternity.
Your bells shall lend their singing tongues to me
For voiceless dreams, ringing over the city
Deep, deep out of all prisoned things with pity.

1925

Sudden Light

BEST I love this mood,
This sensitive troubled hour
Of rising tides, of coming wind.
Now looking out on trees
Their shapes are stern with beauty, strung like harps
Their branches weave a music for me,
And the clouds
Sundered by breasts of light,
Rent by golden javelins of dawn,
Furl themselves around me,
Transmute their radiance, giving eyes
To the blind hope that flits through darkness.
Now in my heart a new necessity
Pushes with ever-strengthening limbs,
Now ecstasy awakes me,
Again those choirs whose voices I had missed
Support me, raise me on their highest note
As though I were their prayer.
Dearest this mood
This suddenness, this glory,
This springing root
And fountain tree of life.

1920

Nantucket

ARE there low houses by the water, painted wooden houses on the hills?
Or fluted hollows of the sand that the sea fills,
Meshed with shining streams when the moon's silver spills?
Or a grey street and a harbour full of ships,
Broken rocks at ebbtide, ropes where the weed drips,
Long jets of wriggling lights, piled clouds and sunset strips?
Are there villas with balconies, do you live in one of these,
Or in a large hotel, or a tavern on the quays,
Or lodging-house with sandy tables under trees
Where the wasps settle and the noons are hot and stale?
Do you laze upon the beach or swim and set your sail
Over the quivering morning sea to hunt the whale?
Do you trace their margins as the loops of foam retreat
And with a many-voiced whisper from their distant beat
Return to weave their lace around your feet?
Is your shadow the one darkness on that white,
Your figure only in the pulse of a blue light,
Only your mind conceiving the delight
Of mindless spirit in its ecstasy?
The wind on liquid flutes shall blow my melody,
Cold from the strange abysses of the sea
My body shall be given you in a shell,
My hair cling to a pebble, and processions of farewell
Pass, to the tolling of a purple bell.

1926

The Castle

A THOUSAND candles in the chandeliers
Glinting from glass and gold and painted tears
On festivals, on ghosts and emptiness,
On fabulous and magical excess
Where each room sighs with fairness like a bride
To the long windows, waiting—and outside
Wind and the mountains and the stars and rain—
Still things that grew out of the artist's pain
Loving confessions which have sealed with art,
Beautiful silences across his heart
Where every eye is flattered by its dream.
The candles on the fleeting mirrors gleam
As one goes up the stairway, down the halls,
A fugitive reflection on the walls,
A hovering grey moth, a stealing waif
To whom all shining seemings are unsafe,
And mockery in all the delicate glories
That shall outlive so many human stories.

1926

Fragment

AND that blue pulse brought forth a star,
There where your glance was bathed,
Where the last thought had plunged
And the last rippling silence smoothed across—
A single shining
Yet to the furthest brimming space sufficient,
The wide, the deep, the still,
Like joy beyond the peace from which it grew,
Pure out of all clearness,
Lonely in all adoring unity,
Breathed into light by the whole heaven
One holy, stillest shining.

1926

One O'Clock

THE tired bell chimes one o'clock,
One hour of all my hours, this one,
This hour with distance, silence,
Distant love shining on flowing tides,
Shining on placid waters writing with fingers of light.
This hour with the night-fowl gibing,
With the frogs' low thrill reiterant,
With the brains of other men in other rooms
Winding watches bringing out hidden thoughts with sighs,
In habitual motions searching for new paths
That sleep soon mazes.
This greyly hour of moon-clouds,
And the light of the moon enfolding such far things,
Such bygone, trackless, unreturning,
Such flesh-far, heart-close wistfulness,
Graves of so many loves with the old tender writing on the stones
Dimly disclosed and covered.
Such a long reach of arms,
Into distance, into time, into the coming dawn,
Into the recesses of the breast, into the clearness of the soul,
Into the ridges and dried riverbeds
With mist-ghost streams;
Into the conscience and bone,
Between the eyes into the place of the will,
Into the passionate pulsations,
Into fatigue and craving.
Long reaching distant light
And greyly shadowing and prefiguring
Heir to so many hours, this hour, dissolving one,
Veiled globe of all the worlds.

1926

The Disciple

YOU, weaving from your spirit and your flesh
Snares of the mind wherein you would enmesh
Him you have held by that same lighted thread
Which in the tangling binds yourself instead.
Within the whorlings of your subtle ear
You lose His voice that you have strained to hear,
Confused with many tongues. And when the calm
Brims in His silence, your own cries alarm,
Answered by echoes as they fall again
Like shadows round that closed, devoted brain.
What doubting watchfulness has dogged His ways,
Yes, spied in sleep His dreams through every maze
Of intricate suspicion, while you miss
His wakening laugh, His grateful evening kiss,
Trap-wary, sceptical. And yet, 'tis this
You cry for lonely, vexing grief with sin
A pitiful reprisal. . . . Here's a pin
For scratching out His eyes, you stab your own—
Pluck out His tongue, it will become your moan—
Blind envy, dumbly praying for His nod. . . .
Your wounds shall be the mouth and eyes of God.

1924

The Defeated

THE world has conquered us,
The ages have bowed us with their proud rebuke—
Bones grow as grass grows to intended stature,
Breath knows not that which breathes.
The heart breathes in the soul
From the conceiving darkness of those pulses
Light brings us forth with alchemy of tides.
Born we accept,
The spirit accepts flesh,
The heart in patience broods upon its seed.
We are fulfilled in deeds,
We are compelled by elements,
We are expressed in vanity
And time restrains us—
In vain the soul prolongs her constant kiss
Upon the forehead of the immutable,
In vain the stars watch through us
Our eyes sleep blind.
In vain our questions seek,
Answers come wearily where the feet rest,
Come wantonly where the hands grasp,
Pitifully where the lips let fall
Tomorrow's precious quest in smiling speech.
But from our littleness we apprehend
The immensity of space to fill with shape,
We are given hope,
Because pain is not deep enough to reach death
Because pain is too great for death to hold,
We overflow,
And one fine vein bores through all stony graves,
In flame of inextinguishable gold.
To overleap our limbs that they may follow,

With worship draw them up as a seed's star
Draws the branches from the root and the leaves and
    flowers
This we have dreamed of, failing,
This prayer is, this is love—
Though earth is strong with elements and tides
And time measures us to the proportion of the brain.
I believe that the unalterable
Will hold us in all change
When we have fallen from the stern command,
And that eternity loves victory
Better than obedience.

1925

Falling

I FALL, I fall
Eveninglike
Out of the musical changing
Gentle fleeces
Sunfilled ripples
Into that stillness
Darker deepening
Of departure
Cold
Aye turning dull
Empty and stilled
The void
Reverberating echoes
No longer
But returning
Echoless sounds
Turning back shrill
Forlorn sounds disenchanted.
I fall
In the falling
Is the downflight
Of all things wingless
All colours colourless
Returning earthward
Earth of burial
Dust dividing
Letting flesh back
Flowers back
Smoke of flames subsiding
Leaves wilt
Down
Dark down
All in darkness falling

Sighs
Ah silence over sighs.
Where the fingers
Straying lighted
Over living strings
Fail
And successions of failing
Subduing
Dying hands
Cover the muted
Quivering pangs
I fail.
I fall
Around you
Through you
Cover your darkness with darkness
Indistinguishable
One from the other
Love I extinguish
Darkness with darkness
Silence with silence
Forever with never.

1926

The Storm-Cloud

AT the end of the long sea in the middle of Heaven
Storm is suspended in a cloud.
Packed with the colours of anger dismally furled,
Twisted in the core of the winds, stilled in their rushing
Held back by hands of calm.
To such glory the proud heart surrenders,
To the terror of thy beauty we shine
Cancelling our lives in immortality
As the sea drowns the rain!
Under that cloud that looms and reaches up
Spreads wide and comes
There is a still place lashed with brightness suddenly—
Trailing the light of a swift angel.

1926

Wild Geese

I SAW grey geese straining over the flat lands,
Wild geese vibrant in the high air,
Saw them as I feel them, symbols,
Felt my soul stiffened out in their throats—
Iron rocks of the north by the wrinkled sea,
With the spring green corn piercing through,
Ribs of a black boat rotting in the sand,
Ribs of a giant
In the endless, wavering, surfprinted lines of desert dunes. . . .
I saw wild geese flying before sunrise,
Ancestral wings lashed to their windy paths,
And the grey whiteness of them ribboning the enormous skies,
And the spokes of the sun over the crumpled hills. . . .

1925

Sea Dirge

YES, I am evening sad,
The gravelight on the sea
Chanting and disenchanting
Old songs in me.
And I have lost the youth I had
Yellow-haired singer of the sea—
The air is mute around where he is gone;
White hairs of the drowned I string
On the lute of his coral bone, lamenting,
And sing the dirge of the gravelight
Leaning alone to the sea.

1926

THE END

Date Due

Due	Returned	Due	Returned

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